

VZCZCXYZ0001
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHRH #5277 1841348
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 031348Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9184
INFO RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT 2143
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH 7413

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 005277

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/03/2016

TAGS: PGOV PREL SA

SUBJECT: MIXED SAUDI REACTION TO KUWAITI ELECTIONS

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Jonathan Fishbein
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) On June 29, the Kuwaiti Parliament held elections, in which women were allowed to run as candidates and vote for the first time. There were twenty-seven women candidates, but none were elected. Saudi media reported mixed reactions to the results. Most Saudi media reported that the elections signaled progress for women's political participation, though some media commented that the losses were due to a lack of confidence in the female candidates.

¶2. (U) Writers on many Arabic-language internet sites voiced strong opinions that women have no place in politics. Statements on several sites claimed that women's participation in parliament, rubbing shoulders with men, and pictures of women candidates in newspapers were in direct violation of Islam. Such editorials opined that many women voted for men "because women have a high political awareness and know that men must be in the parliament, not women." Some writers even alluded to the "noise" of women's rights in Saudi Arabia, claiming that women in the Kingdom are backed by Western agents and not by actual supporters.

¶3. (SBU) Despite such commentary, many intellectuals remain optimistic. Discussions with several female academics and intellectuals from the Riyadh community indicate that they were pleased with the results of the Kuwaiti elections. They told PolOff that although no women were elected, reforms in this part of the world move very slowly, the fact that women were candidates in the Kuwaiti election was a positive step overall. They also noted that the reforms in Saudi Arabia are slowly improving. Steps such as allowing women to vote and participate in elections in neighboring countries, help to bolster the reform movement in the Kingdom.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Although the English-language Saudi media generally reported the Kuwaiti parliamentary elections as a sign of general progress for women's rights and political participation, there remains a strong, conservative element of Saudi society adamantly opposed to reformation efforts. The strong response by Saudi conservatives to the election results follows the recent trend of counter-reformation. Conservatives seized upon this opportunity to gloat, denoting the winning of the male incumbents as the only proper result, and twisting a historical first into a failure of the West to successfully influence the people of the region. END
COMMENT.

OBERWETTER